



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY  
REGION 10

1200 Sixth Avenue, Suite 900  
Seattle, WA 98101-3140

OFFICE OF THE  
REGIONAL ADMINISTRATOR

February 7, 2011

President Wassillie Wonhola  
New Stuyahok Traditional Council  
P.O. Box 49  
New Stuyahok, Alaska 99636

Dear President Wonhola:

In 2010, a number of tribes and tribal entities in Southwest Alaska requested that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 10 (EPA) begin a public process under the Clean Water Act, Section 404(c), in relation to metallic sulfide mining in the Bristol Bay watershed. Section 404(c) authorizes EPA to restrict or prohibit the use of a water body as a disposal site for dredged or fill material if the discharge will have unacceptable adverse effects on municipal water supplies, fish or shellfish, wildlife or recreation. Other Alaska tribes and tribal entities requested that we let the typical permitting process for mines run its course. I initially responded to all these requests that EPA would seriously consider them and respond in the future. I am writing now to inform you that EPA is initiating a watershed assessment of Bristol Bay, focusing primarily on the Kvichak and Nushagak drainages. The assessment will characterize the risks of large-scale developments on the Bristol Bay salmon fishery, and evaluate measures to protect the watersheds and ensure the sustainability of that fishery. We will conduct this assessment in an open, public format as was requested. The overall process will include:

- Collection and evaluation of scientific and technical information;
- Opportunities for tribal, state and federal experts to participate in review of the information;
- Public meetings; and
- Tribal consultation

There are many details to be worked out and we will be engaging with the tribes and stakeholders as we move forward to implement this watershed assessment. For your information, I am enclosing an outline of our draft watershed assessment process. If you have any questions or would like more information, please feel free to call me or Richard Parkin, our EPA lead for conducting this risk assessment. Mr. Parkin can be reached at (206)553-8574. He will be available at the Alaska Forum on the Environment to discuss this effort, and will specifically attend the GAP closing session on Friday, February 11, 2011 from 10:30-11:45am AK time to answer questions and discuss this effort.

Sincerely,

Dennis J. McLerran  
Regional Administrator